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1905

MAINE
COMMISSIONER
OF
EDUCATION
GAINS
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1905



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Gains—Per Contra

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State of Maine *Office of state commissioner*
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Educational Department

1905

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Copies of this pamphlet will be sent on application to W. W. Stetson,
State Superintendent of Public Schools.

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GAINS.

It is worth while, occasionally, to recount our blessings. One does not have to look far, or closely, to discover that improvement has been made in the schools of Maine through the interest manifested and work done by parents, school officials, teachers and pupils. The time has arrived when a somewhat detailed statement of the facts is justified.

MONEY.

Many municipalities, at the last town meeting, voted larger sums for the maintenance of schools than were asked for by the school committees. This action indicates that the day has passed when voters are willing to sustain a motion that the amount required by law be raised for schools. It also shows they are intelligently considering two questions: First, the needs of the schools and second, the extent to which their resources will allow their demands to be met. When these questions shall have been discussed and decided in the right spirit, the welfare of the school will be assured.

INTEREST AND WORK.

The evidences of an interest on the part of a majority of our people in the improvement of the school are too numerous for rehearsal. They come to the department through correspondence, reports of officials and personal testimonies. There is a disposition to look for the best things in the work of the teacher and the results achieved. There is much less carping because of the enjoyment the faultfinder derives from criticising and nagging. There is a willingness to work for and with the school. Material is supplied and service rendered to a much greater extent than in former years.

“STANDARD SCHOOLS.”

The plan for “standard schools” has been so intelligently discussed in the newspapers, the women’s clubs and by school officials as to indicate that its merits are being recognized. It has met with a much more favorable reception than was anticipated. A large number of letters have been received approving the scheme and expressing a desire to have the schools in which the writers are personally interested placed on this list.

The movement has stimulated an interest in better physical surroundings, in simplifying and systematizing the course of study, improving methods of instruction and increasing the thoroughness of the work done. The indirect benefits derived from the outlines have proved that the time is ripe for the presentation of the plan proposed and that our people are prepared to make use of the suggestions therein contained.

Two states, besides Maine, have adopted and are promulgating the “standard school” idea and there is a prospect that it will extend throughout the country.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT LEAGUE.

The statement that the School Improvement League has done more for the betterment of the schools than any other agency during the past quarter of a century has been proven by so many instances that its correctness cannot longer be questioned.

It has rendered its greatest service by calling attention to present conditions, the necessity for changes and convincing the people concerned that the work must be done by those living in the community in which the school is located. Concentrating the attention of the entire population of any section upon its school interests always results, not only in better schools, but also in showing the people that they must decide what shall be done and be responsible for its performance. This necessitates the devising of plans, the choice of possibilities, taste in selecting and judgment in using. These efforts, in turn, result in intellectual training, moral nurture and æsthetic culture.

The League has stimulated in the children an intelligent sense of personal responsibility and has fostered a pride in the local school. It has brought them the inspiration which comes from serving others and developed a new conception of civic right-

eousness. It has also given them the joy born of honest toil and the ambition nurtured by mastering the task attempted. It has enlarged their outlook, corrected their perspective and helped them to a better knowledge of themselves, their associates and the varied relations of life.

A large number of the schools are supplied with libraries, furnished through the efforts of teachers and pupils. The work done in this field is as extensive as it is commendable.

TEACHERS.

Maine has more teachers holding State licenses than any other state in the Union. This reveals a spirit of enterprise and desire to do better service that are most encouraging.

Nearly four-fifths of the teachers attended the county teachers' meetings; a little less than one-third were present at the annual session of the State Association; about one-fourth were members of the summer schools and, of the whole number employed, nearly one-third are graduates of normal or training schools.

The number of teachers continued in the same school for the past year is much larger than is shown by any previous report, the aggregate being 2,584. The total number employed was 6,658, and of this number 5,682 had previous experience.

Many of our teachers are reading books on pedagogy and an increasing number are showing their interest in a broader culture, by the study they are giving to works of standard authors.

They are learning that to be of service they must have sympathy for the plodder and wayward, with the genius and unbalanced and that they must be filled with that enthusiasm which makes hard things easy and sinks self in the work to which they give their lives.

PUPILS.

There has been a large increase in the number of pupils attending the secondary schools. This change is due to two causes: First, the improvement of the work done in the common schools and the influence exerted by teachers in stimulating the more promising students to attend higher institutions of learning and, second, to the law which provides that the towns and the State shall pay the tuition of pupils who live in municipalities in which secondary schools of standard grade are not

maintained. The gain in this particular is so marked as to attract general attention and has assisted in making acceptable a law which, at first, was severely criticised.

This statute is one of the most important that has been enacted in half a century and, when fully understood and honestly administered, will be of great help in improving the common schools and will be of incalculable benefit to the boys and girls in rural communities.

SCHOOL OFFICIALS.

There has been a change for the better in the personnel of the school boards. Towns are more careful to elect persons who are competent and interested in the work. These officers are striving to provide better schools. The executive work is largely performed by the superintendent and the legislative functions are in charge of the committee. The two are working in harmony and, as a result, most of our schools are provided with courses of study, greater care is used in the examination, certification and employment of teachers and there is a more intelligent inspection of the work done.

CITIZENS.

It has already been intimated that there is a feeling on the part of our people which signifies that, in the near future, towns will vote for the maintenance of schools the largest sums consistent with the local valuations; that school grounds, buildings and furnishings will be the best the local communities can provide; that a high grade of teaching force will be demanded and that pupils will be held to a stricter account in matters of attendance and mastery of studies.

It is also gratifying to learn that the patrons of the school have furnished the funds necessary for the purchase of 35,464 books for school libraries; that, during the past year, the children and their parents have contributed \$7,319 for the improvement of schoolrooms and yards. These figures tell a story as inspiring as it is significant and indicate that local interest in the local school is a factor to be counted on.

ART.

A majority of the schools have provided their rooms with works of art of real merit. The taste exhibited in the selection of pictures and statuary is most commendable. It is doubtful

if our people realize how great has been the revolution in this particular.

The placing of works of art where they may be seen by children is important. Many teachers have taken the next step and have assisted the boys and girls in appreciating the beauties and teachings of these messages of wisdom. In not a few cases they are led to discover somewhat of the simpler technical details of a picture as well as to read the thought the artist sought to express. The value of this service is recognized by those only who can see things not in sight.

SCHOOL WORK.

Many of our more intelligent teachers are putting more emphasis on principles, requiring greater proficiency in processes, omitting not a few of the less important topics and giving but limited time to minor details. They are insisting that pupils do their own work and master the studies pursued. In addition to all these gains they are giving attention to the manners of their pupils and are securing a willing observance of conventional forms. They are also interesting the child in an intelligent reading of a few good books, the appreciation of some form of nature and are helping him to acquire proficiency in some study or activity for which, or in which, he shows an aptitude. The so-called "bad boy" and the "mischievous girl" are being studied and helped.

These teachers have, each year, a broader outlook, a saner conception of their duties and have acquired a skill in the administration of their schools that is worthy of high praise.

If it were possible to promote the less efficient members of the teaching force into this class and advance the best to the next higher, long looked for results would be made possible.

The work done shows what may be accomplished and reveals the means necessary to ensure coveted improvements. When all hands are joined with those already united, then the good day will be near at hand.

These hopeful signs give promise of a future in which we may not only take comfort but derive a strength which will give us a creditable place in the educational activities of the Nation.

AMENDMENTS TO THE SCHOOL LAWS.

The following amendments to the school laws have been made during the past ten years. Many of them have vindicated their usefulness and a few have not received this distinction. Some of the more important changes are as follows:

The school committee is limited to three members.

Towns are required to furnish text-books for all public schools, including common and high schools. Parents are authorized to purchase books for the exclusive use of their children, if they prefer to do so.

Provision has been made for the schooling of children in unorganized townships.

The educational department has been authorized to examine and certificate teachers, said certificates to be accepted in lieu of a personal examination given by local school officials.

Towns must pay for books, apparatus, supplies, repairs, insurance, improvements on grounds, et cetera, from moneys raised for these purposes and not from common or high school funds.

Academies, institutes and seminaries, receiving State aid, must maintain standard courses of study; they must be in session at least thirty weeks each year; they must have an average attendance of not less than thirty pupils and an attendance from towns other than those in which they are located of at least ten pupils and must not have an income to exceed \$1,600 per year.

Schools failing to maintain an average attendance of at least eight pupils are discontinued unless the town at the annual meeting, on the written recommendation of the committee, votes to maintain said schools.

Provision has been made for the union of towns for the employment of a superintendent of schools whose term of office shall not exceed five years. The minimum and maximum number of schools included in any union are specified, as are the minimum salary and maximum amount to be paid by the State.

Candidates for admission to free high schools must be examined before they are entitled to enter said schools.

School committees are authorized to fill vacancies in their membership until the next annual election and also to fill vacancies in the office of truant officer.

Conveyance for pupils must be provided by the superintendent of schools when, in the judgment of the school committee,

transportation is necessary. Committees are allowed to pay the board of pupils when it is found inexpedient to furnish transportation. A paragraph provides that transportation may be furnished for the whole or a part of the distance, as authorized by the committee..

The superintendent is elected by the committee, but he cannot be a member of the board. This official has been authorized to examine, certificate and employ teachers, said employment being subject to the approval of the committee.

The Governor and Council have been instructed to withhold State school funds from delinquent towns and from all towns in which the school moneys are not expended for the maintenance of schools established and controlled by said towns and which, in any other way, fail to comply with the laws relating to schools.

Every child between the seventh and fifteenth anniversaries of his birth must attend school for the full time for which the schools are in session in the towns in which he resides, provided he is not mentally or physically incapacitated for such attendance, or provided he does not receive equivalent schooling in some manner approved by the superintending school committee.

Provision has been made for the schooling of blind children at South Boston.

All free public schools established by gifts or bequests are placed under the control of the State Superintendent of Public Schools, who is also required to perform all duties imposed on him by the charters granted by the legislature to educational institutions.

Legal school holidays are enumerated and established.

The free high school year ends with July 1st and the half year with December 31st.

Detailed provision is made for the location of school lots and the right of aggrieved parties to appeal to county commissioners within six months is granted.

Power is given for the establishment of manual training schools by towns and cities.

The Industrial School for Girls has been accepted by the State as has also the school for deaf mutes at Portland.

Towns must fence school lots under certain conditions.

Towns not accounting for interest on permanent school funds must raise \$45 in addition to all other sums required by law.

One-half of the taxes on trust and banking companies is apportioned and distributed as a school fund.

The Aroostook State Normal School has been established at Presque Isle.

Unexpended balances of school funds must be brought forward and credited to resources in the following year.

Towns must expend the entire amount of common school funds during the year for which it is appropriated, for wages and board of teachers, fuel, janitor services, conveyance, tuition and board of pupils and must make special provision for all other school expenses.

Duties of superintendent of schools and school committee have been defined, together with the returns to be made by the superintendent.

Provision is made for the payment by the towns, of the tuition of pupils who reside in municipalities in which secondary schools of standard grade are not maintained; one-half of said tuition to be reimbursed to the town by the State, under certain restrictions.

Towns may contract with adjoining towns for the schooling of pupils in secondary schools.

School committees, with an equal number from the board of trustees, shall form a joint committee for the selection of teachers and the arranging of the course of study in academies receiving State aid, when such academies have an endowment of less than \$10,000.

PER CONTRA.

While the foregoing statements are made with care and are intended as a record of facts, yet it must not be assumed that our school conditions are ideal; that sacrifices are not needed; that improvements are not necessary and that progress is not our watchword. Most lamentable details mar our record and disgrace our school system. To these we must address ourselves and, unless they can be re-placed by better results, our work must be counted, at least, a partial failure.

FUNDS.

Some towns are content to house their children in buildings unfit for the use of human beings and are unwilling to furnish books and apparatus necessary for the efficient administration

of the schools. These communities will not tax themselves to such an extent as makes possible the employment of teachers who can conduct schools of worth.

INTEREST AND WORK.

In this class of towns there is a scant interest in the school. Little is done for it by the individual citizen except to criticize the teachers, discourage the children, complain of taxes and recite the legend that, "what was good enough for me is good enough for my children." The indifference and hostility manifested in these communities are beyond statement and hardly within the comprehension of one not familiar with the facts.

While these strictures apply to a small minority, yet they are true of a number too large for the safety of the State.

Changes can only be wrought through the interest and activity of local citizens who are willing to spend the time necessary to learn the facts and develop in their neighbors a desire for a better school. What these communities need more than anything else is a live Improvement League in which all the citizens hold membership.

TEACHERS.

We have too many teachers who belong in the inefficient class. They are lacking in scholastic attainments, professional training, aptness to teach and personality. Some of them are relatives of school officials or of influential citizens and others are employed because of the indifference of these officers to the value of a good school and therefore they will not make the effort necessary to provide suitable instructors.

About one-sixth of the teaching force are failures for some of the reasons indicated above. These incompetents should be replaced by teachers who have a reasonable equipment for the work and until this is done these schools cannot be improved.

PUPILS.

Our greatest misfeasance in the care of children is found in the kind of food we provide for them. No child can attain to his best estate physically, morally or intellectually who is allowed to drink tea or coffee, or eat any considerable quantity of confectionery and pastry, or partake of highly seasoned

foods. The number of children who do all these things is so large as to seem incredible.

This is the age that will be charged with producing the victims of patent medicines. Scientific research has made it clear that many of these concoctions are highly injurious. People holding respectable positions have been adjudged victims of alcoholism because of the use they have made of these compounds. Is this great army recruited from the ranks of the children who drink tea and coffee, eat confectionery and pastry and live exciting and demoralizing lives?

People need no longer wonder that the use of tobacco and stimulants is increasing so long as they foster the conditions which must inevitably bring these results.

What right have we to expect a child whose breakfast consists of coffee strong enough to make a veteran wince and fat-laden doughnuts, to do his work in school or grow into a worthy citizen? Upon the home rests the responsibility of making needed changes in these particulars.

Many children are injured by being clothed in apparel which develops vanity in the wearer and envy in his companion. These children are also harmed by the social functions in which they are permitted to participate and at which they make exhibitions of themselves as inartistic as they are harmful.

When we recall the surroundings that mar and the influences that make some of the children, should we be surprised that they are slow in learning the wisdom of the Carlylian philosophy? This wise Scotchman has told us that the fraction of life can be increased in value not so much by increasing the numerator as by lessening the denominator.

The pampering and coddling the children receive in the form of mistaken kindnesses are doing them serious injury. A child who has not learned to obey cheerfully has missed the greatest blessing made possible by the home or the school. Their next greatest service is to develop in him a love for and a habit of work. Unless the child delights in conquering difficulties through his own efforts and mastering the tasks assigned him, his home and school have done him but little good and may have done him much harm.

Emerson has told us we deprive our children of the chance to succeed by making it unnecessary for them to work and shielding them from responsibilities.

The spirit of insolence, the attitude or arrogance, the willingness to evade tasks, the disposition to resent authority and the desire to be prominent on public occasions and to wear striking apparel are portents of future possibilities that should not only give us anxiety but will bring us trouble.

SCHOOL OFFICIALS.

In some municipalities school officials are elected after most of the voters have left the town meeting. Many times the selection is made without any thought of the fitness of the candidate for the office. In such cases the person chosen has some selfish interest to serve and therefore accepts the position.

Superintendents are selected who truckle to the board. When such conditions exist the schools are the football of men who have too little conscience to be in charge of public interests. As a result incapable teachers are employed and the school is so worthless that it is worse than none. That such things should not be admits of no discussion; that they exist is beyond question. The remedy is in the hands of the people and they are responsible for inaugurating reforms.

England's first great teacher makes record of the fact that we are more willing to spend money and effort on the training of a colt than on the care and nurture of the child and, as a result, our colts are gentle and serviceable and our children are untamed and unsafe members of society.

These failures in our management and training of children account for the existence of a demand for physical ease and enjoyment to the extent of killing ambition and paralyzing effort.

BY THE WAY.

While there are many things to commend, much in which to rejoice and a future of great promise, still there are not a few items that should give us concern. Public opinion should be more active and intelligent; school officials need to give more thought to the details of their duties and be governed by a higher moral sense in their service; teachers must more nearly resemble the artist; pupils must receive better nurture in the home and more intelligent training in the school. We must put our thought and effort into strengthening our strong points and correcting our mistakes.

There is a danger signal in the statement of employers that young people are disposed to make the least return possible for the money paid for a service. Many fail of advancement because they refuse to study the interest of those for whom they work and limit their efforts to the task assigned them. They not only have to be told what to do and how to do it, but they have to be watched and supervised in their work and, instead of striving to find better ways of doing a given thing, they shirk responsibilities and leave behind all thought of duties when they close the front door to their places of labor.

There is a demand for young men and women who are anxious to prove themselves fitted for better places than the ones they are trying to fill. The youth who will study his task, the ways of doing it, the possibilities of making improvements and who is willing to give extra effort or added time under special conditions, is sought for and will be promoted as rapidly as his merits warrant. The call is for those who study, think, are in earnest and eager to be found worthy.

The business man is looking for the boy who is tidy in his apparel and clean in his habits and who is not afraid of hard work and over-alls. He wants a lad who can spell and write acceptably and who is familiar with the fundamental processes in arithmetic and accurate in the use of figures.

He has scant confidence in the young man who is not trying to prepare himself to do something and who instead trusts to luck for something to do and ability to do it. He wants him to have discernment enough to discover that money is not the only reward given for faithful service. He must be controlled by the determination to make a success of what he undertakes and not be content with what he is doing until he can do it better than any one else of equal capacity.

He seeks the boy who knows the joy which comes from doing his best every time and he has no use for the one who is more ambitious to follow than to lead. If he is willing to depend on his parents for a lift, or relatives for a boost, he will not fill the bill.

It is a hard lesson for young people to learn that, if they never do more than they are paid for, they will never be paid for more than they are doing.

Unless pupils learn to work and play as comrades, unless they are sensitive about the rights of others and the duties they owe their associates; unless they can live helpfully in their school, social and semi-business relations while students, there is slight prospect of their being able to do these things when they come to years of maturity.

If necessary, the school should do less text-book work and devote more time to developing in the children those qualities which will make them safe citizens. It is a part of the work of the teacher to help the children to abhor evil and love the good. The child who knows the value of economy and the necessity of thrift, who is honest in his thought and dealings with his fellows, will add his contribution to the moral and material worth of the community.

The school is responsible for doing all it can to persuade boys not to smoke cigarettes. The school cannot do this work alone. The home must come to a realizing sense of the extent and danger of this evil and join with the school in bringing about needed changes.

This habit is on the increase. A larger proportion of the boys are indulging in this practice than even thoughtful people realize. It would be startling if the facts were put in figures. There is no disposition to discuss the effect of the use of tobacco upon adults. All sane people know that its use is a serious and, in most cases, a fatal injury to persons who have not reached their physical maturity. This proposition does not admit of discussion. The facts are beyond question. The necessity for action is urgent. The question is a pertinent one. What do we propose to do about it?

FACTS AND FIGURES.

An investigation made by the judge of a Juvenile Court and extending through several months shows the following comparative record of smokers and non-smokers (20 each) taken at random from a school of 500 pupils. The figures in the first column deal with twenty smokers and those in the second with twenty non-smokers.

	Smokers.	Non-Smokers.
Nervous	14	1
Poor memory	12	1
Bad manners	16	2
Impaired hearing	13	1
Low deportment	18	1
Poor physical condition.....	12	2
Bad moral condition	14	0
Bad mental condition.....	18	1
Street loafers	16	0
Out nights	15	0
Careless in dress	12	4
Truants	10	0
Low rank in studies	18	3
Older than average of grade.....	19	2
Untruthful	9	0
Slow thinkers	19	3
Poor workers or not able to work continuously.	17	1
Failed of promotion.....	17	2

TRUANTS.

There are supposed to be at least 525 truant officers in the State. It is the duty of these officials, as well as of the superintendent, school committees and teachers, to see that all children between seven and fifteen years of age who are not receiving equivalent instruction in other schools, or are not physically or mentally incapacitated for attending schools, attend the schools in the towns in which they reside for the full time for which said schools are in session.

The returns made under oath reveal the appalling fact that there were last year 4,342 boys and 3,165 girls between seven and fifteen years of age and not included in the above exempted classes, who were not in attendance upon any school. These figures are as startling as they are distressing. They mean that we have a scattered population large enough to make a community greater than that of our first city, with no child between seven and fifteen years of age in any school. Unless those who are responsible for the enforcement of this law are more faithful in the performance of their duties the legislature should make such amendments to the statutes as will prevent the continuance of this most lamentable condition.

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